

Message Text

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ORIGIN NODS-00

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DRAFTED BY:S/S-O:SGOLDSMITH

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S E C R E T STATE 175400 TOSEC 080026

NODIS

FOLLOWING REPEAT TEL AVIV 8752 ACTION SECSTATE AMMAN
BEIRUT DAMASCUS CAIRO JERUSALEM JIDDA KUWAIT LONDON
PARIS ROME USUN JUL 12

QQUOTE S E C R E T TEL AVIV 8752

EXDIS--DIST AS NODIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, PINS, LE, IS

SUBJECT: LEBANESE CRISIS - DISCUSSION WITH BEGIN

REF: STATE 174090

1. I MET ALONE WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN AT MY REQUEST
FOR APPROXIMATELY THIRTY MINUTES LATE MORNING OF JULY 11.
TOLD HIM THAT I WANTED TO EXCHANGE VIEWS INFORMALLY AND
VERY FRANKLY WITH HIM ABOUT THE LEBANESE CRISIS WHICH I
HAD BEEN DISCUSSING FREQUENTLY WITH WEIZMAN DURING RECENT

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DAYS. SAID I WAS REASSURED BY WEIZMAN'S STATEMENTS TO
ME ABOUT ISRAELI EFFORTS TO DISABUSE CHRISTIAN MILITIA
LEADERS OF BELIEF THAT THEY COULD COUNT ON ISRAELI
MILITARY INTERVENTION TO PULL THEIR CHESTNUTS OUT OF THE
FIRE. NONETHELESS, I HAD TO REPORT TO HIM THAT WE CONTINUED
TO GET INTELLIGENCE FROM BEIRUT THAT PHALANGISTS
IN PARTICULAR SEEMED DETERMINEDLY PREPARING TO GO AFTER

THE SYRIANS AND CONVINCED THAT ISRAEL WOULD STEP IN TO HELP THEM IF NECESSARY.

2. THEN WENT OVER FOR BEGIN THE VARIOUS ELEMENTS IN OUR THINKING ABOUT NEXT STEPS, SUMMARIZED IN REFTTEL, STRESSING THE NEED TO KEEP THE UNEASY CEASEFIRE IN BEING WHILE ENCOURAGING THE VARIOUS LEBANESE LEADERS AND THE SYRIANS TO WORK OUT SOME FORM OF DISENGAGEMENT TO LOWER THE RISK OF RENEWED MILITARY CONFRONTATION. I STRESSED THAT THE SYRIANS WERE RESTRAINING THEMSELVES FROM RESPONDING TO SNIPER FIRE OR OTHER LIMITED CHRISTIAN MILITIA PROVOCATIONS. HOWEVER, THEY HAD LEFT US IN NO DOUBT THAT IF MASSIVELY PROVOKED AGAIN THEY WOULD RESPOND EVEN MORE MASSIVELY, AT THE INEVITABLE COST OF GREAT BLOODSHED AND DESTRUCTION IN BEIRUT. I PAINTED A GRAPHIC PICTURE OF HOW MISINTERPRETATION OF ISRAELI INTENTIONS COULD LEAD TO CHRISTIAN MISCALCULATION AND ULTIMATELY TO THE OUTBREAK OF MAJOR WAR BETWEEN SYRIA AND ISRAEL, UNDERSCORING WHAT I HAD BEEN SAYING TO WEIZMAN DAILY ABOUT THE NEED TO GET ACROSS UNEQUIVOCAL MESSAGE TO THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS THAT THEY WILL NOT HAVE ISRAELI MILITARY SUPPORT IF THEY PROVOKE A MASSIVE SYRIAN RESPONSE BY THEIR ACTIONS.

3. BEGIN LISTENED INTENTLY TO MY LENGTHY PRESENTATION OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE CRISIS. HE THEN CONFIRMED THAT THE GOI HAD BEEN AND WAS CONTINUALLY COUNSELING
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MODERATION AND RESTRAINT TO THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS WITH WHOM THEY WERE IN CONTACT. HE SAID HE FULLY ENDORSED THE STATEMENTS WEIZMAN HAD MADE TO ME ABOUT ISRAEL'S DETERMINATION TO AVOID BEING DRAWN INTO MILITARY ACTION. HE SAID THAT WEIZMAN'S ASSURANCES WERE FULLY SUPPORTED BY THE CABINET. HE ACKNOWLEDGED, HOWEVER, THAT THERE COULD BE A REAL DANGER OF "SLIDING DOWN A SLIPPERY SLOPE INTO WAR" IF THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS MISCALCULATED AND DREW UPON THEMSELVES THE FULL WEIGHT OF THE SYRIAN IRE, SINCE POLITICAL PRESSURES AND MORAL COMMITMENTS WERE GREAT IN ISRAEL "NOT TO PERMIT THE CHRISTIANS TO BE SLAUGHTERED." HE SEEMED TO TAKE VERY SERIOUSLY MY STRICTURES ABOUT THE NEED TO DISABUSE THE GEMAYELS AND OTHER CHRISTIAN LEADERS OF THE BELIEF THAT THEY HAVE FULL ISRAELI BACKING; AT SAME TIME, HE SAID IT HAD BEEN IMPORTANT TO KEEP THEIR MORALE FROM COLLAPSING,
AND
THAT THIS HAD BEEN THE PURPOSE OF THE AIRCRAFT OVER-FLIGHTS A FEW DAYS AGO. I SAID IT WAS ALL VERY GOOD TO KEEP THE CHRISTIANS' MORALE UP, BUT ACTIONS LIKE OVER-FLIGHTS RAN THE GRAVE RISK OF IMPLYING A READINESS TO DO MORE THAN JUST OVERFLY, THEREBY ENCOURAGING THE VERY

THING WE WERE ALL ANXIOUS TO AVOID--OUTBREAK OF MASSIVE VIOLENCE AGAIN TRIGGERED BY CHRISTIAN AGGRESSIVENESS. HE RUEFULLY ADMITTED THAT THIS WAS INDEED A REAL DILEMMA.

4. BEGIN COMMENTED AT ONE POINT ON THE FACT THAT ALL ISRAELI CONTACTS ARE WITH LEADERS OF THE CHRISTIAN MILITIA GROUPS, NONE WITH THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT. HE SAID HE THOUGHT IT WOULD CLEARLY HELP TO AVOID MISCALCULATION IF THE GOI COULD BE IN TOUCH WITH MEMBERS OF THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT, NOT JUST THE "UNOFFICIAL" CHRISTIAN LEADERS.

5. WE CONCLUDED THE CONVERSATION WITH MUTUAL ASSURANCES OF VERY CLOSE CONSULTATION IN THE DAYS AHEAD. I AGAIN
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ASKED HIM TO DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO URGE RESTRAINT ON THE CHRISTIANS, AND ASSURED HIM WE WERE DOING EVERYTHING DIPLOMATICALLY WITHIN OUR POWER IN ALL INFLUENTIAL CAPITALS, INCLUDING SPECIFICALLY JIDDA, TO URGE RESTRAINT AND A NEGOTIATED SOLUTION ON BOTH THE SYRIANS AND THE LEBANESE.

6. BEGIN'S FINAL WORDS TO ME WERE "THEN LETS AGREE THAT THERE ARE TWO OVERRIDING PRINCIPLES WHICH MUST BE MAINTAINED: NO MASSACRE OF CHRISTIANS IN LEBANON, AND NO WAR BETWEEN ISRAEL AND SYRIA." I RESPONDED THAT WE COULD THOROUGHLY ENDORSE BOTH PRINCIPLES, AND WOULD CERTAINLY DO OUR BEST TO SEE THAT THEY WERE OBSERVED. LEWIS.
UNQUOTE CHRISTOPHER

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